



File Code: 1950
Date: July 9, 2019

Interested Individual:

The Tellico and Ocoee-Hiwassee Ranger Districts of the Cherokee National Forest have prepared an environmental assessment and a draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Restoration of Dry Forest Communities on the South Zone of the Cherokee National Forest

Unlike other analyses that result in a decision that implements specific actions on the ground, this decision is programmatic in nature. Thus, this analysis and decision will identify ecological desired conditions, propose a suite of actions that could be taken when various conditions exist within a stand, and identify additional criteria or design elements that should be applied to specific actions.

This programmatic decision will not authorize any site-specific (ground-disturbing) action that can be implemented. Additional environmental analyses (environmental assessments or categorical exclusions) that tier to and incorporate by reference this programmatic analysis will need to be developed and a new decision(s) issued prior to any implementation. This approach is consistent with the 2014 guidance provided by the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ 2014).

This programmatic decision allows for approximately 62,000 acres of white and Virginia pine to be treated across the 300,000-acre landscape once a site-specific NEPA analysis and decision has been issued. This decision approves the following actions:

- Utilize a suite of silvicultural activities including both commercial and non-commercial vegetation treatments and site preparation for natural vegetation regeneration and planting.
- Utilize prescribed fire to create and maintain desired conditions and the use of fire to enhance the success of regeneration on sites that require planting. In situations where the off-site pines are encroaching into the understory of an otherwise diverse and characteristic dry forest community, preference should be given to the use of prescribed fire. Fire would be used at its ecologically appropriate intensity, duration, frequency and spatial extent. Containment lines would be preferentially determined using existing roads, streams, and other natural and man-made features to minimize additional ground disturbance (dozer lines).
- Utilize herbicides for restoration purposes that are for a targeted species and are applied in a targeted manner. Herbicide use is most beneficial where prescribed fire or mechanical treatments alone cannot meet the desired objective. It may also be beneficial in conjunction with other treatments. A suite of herbicides would be used to prepare or



manage a site that has been treated to remove “offsite pine species” and promote desirable native species composition.

- All herbicides and surfactants would be used in accordance with label requirements and Revised Land and Resource Management Plan standards. Chemical treatments could include streamline basal bark, hack and squirt, cut stem surface, or foliar spray methodologies. Active ingredients that have been approved for Forest Service use include but are not limited to glyphosate, triclopyr, and imazapyr.
- To provide adequate access to treatments and conduct reconstruction on national forest system roads, temporary roads [Forest Service Manual (FSM) 7700, zero code] would be constructed as necessary.

The draft Decision Notice and Finding of NO Significant Impact and the EA and appendices are available online at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55303> or may be requested from each of the districts.

The proposed project is subject to the pre-decisional objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 28 Subparts A and B.

How to Object and Timeframe

The opportunity to object ends 45 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in *The Advocate & Democrat* and *Polk County News*, Sweetwater and Bento, TN, respectively. However, when the time period expires on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, the time is extended to the end of the next Federal working day. The publication date of the legal notice in the newspapers of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection and those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by another source.

Objections will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or other designated opportunity for public comment. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after designated comment opportunities §218.8(c).

The objection must contain the minimum content requirements specified in 218.8(d) and incorporation of document by reference is permitted only as provided in 218.8(b). It is the objector’s responsibility to ensure timely filing of written objection with the reviewing officer. All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

Written objection, including attachments should be filed with Reviewing Officer D. JaSal Morris, Forest Supervisor, Cherokee National Forest: by postal mail or hand delivery at 2800 N. Ocoee St., Cleveland, TN 37312; by facsimile at 423-476-9721; or by email at objections-southern-chokeee@fs.fed.us. The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered objections are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic objections must be submitted in a format such as an email, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (doc,

docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf). Please state "Dry Communities" in the subject line when provided electronic objections, or on the envelope when sending by postal mail or hand delivery.

For further information on this decision, contact Mike Wright, District Ranger, Ocoee/Hiwassee Ranger District, 3171 Highway 64, Benton, TN 37307 or at (423) 338-3300 or Stephanie Bland, District Ranger, Tellico Ranger District, 250 Ranger Station Road, Tellico Plains, TN 37385 or at (423) 253-8400.

Thank you for your continued interest in the management of the Cherokee National Forest.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL WRIGHT
District Ranger